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REMARKS TO THE PRESS

**REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN L. POWELL
AND BULGARIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SOLOMON PASSY
AFTER THEIR MEETING**

**NDK Conference Site
Sofia, Bulgaria
December 7, 2004**

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: (in Bulgarian) Good morning. It is a great pleasure for me to say good morning here in Bulgaria to Secretary of State Colin Powell, a great friend of ours, with whom we spent almost four full years, hand in hand as allies and friends. I want to thank him for all the support that he personally, and through him the US administration, provided to Bulgaria. Those were four exceptionally successful years. In the course of these years, Bulgaria conducted and finalized the NATO accession negotiations, finalized the negotiations with the EU, then had a very productive term of office in the UN Security Council, where again we were shoulder to shoulder with Colin Powell. And then hopefully we have had a very successful Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE, the largest trans-Atlantic organization. Therefore, I would like to thank Colin Powell for his powerful support from the bottom of my heart. I would like to thank him also for the friendship between America and Europe, for which he was such an outstanding champion. I would like to thank him also for keeping the trans-Atlantic bridge strong, sound and viable in those so very difficult years in the wake of the 11th of September. As a sign of friendship, I have prepared a gift for him.

(Foreign Minister Passy presents Secretary Powell with a sword.)

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much. I am ready to go back to the Army now.

(Laughter)

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: Thank you, Colin. Thank you for everything you did for America and Europe.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much, Solomon, and thank you for that very beautiful gift. I want to thank Minister Passy for hosting us today here in Sofia and I would like to thank him for his leadership during the Bulgarian chairmanship of OSCE this year. Solomon is a true friend and I am always pleased to be with him.

Solomon, our friendship and your role in OSCE are part of a larger picture. As Bulgaria has joined the trans-Atlantic community, Bulgaria has again and again taken a leading

role in the democratic cause in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the Security Council last year, and in NATO. Bulgaria always stands up when it counts and we are so proud to be counted with you in the cause of freedom. And as you noted, you have so much to be proud of over the past four years in terms of accomplishments with respect to NATO, with respect to the European Union, with respect to the vital role you played in the Security Council.

The United States strongly supports the work of OSCE because it produces results. The OSCE has again made significant contributions in its tireless support of free and fair elections from Georgia to Afghanistan. When I turned on the radio to check the results of Afghanistan's presidential elections, the first voice I heard from Kabul was that of Ambassador Bob Barry, the leader of the OSCE delegation that was observing those elections. Bob reassured the world community, and he did it in the name of the OSCE, that the results reflected the choice of the Afghan men and women who came out under such difficult circumstances to cast their vote in the first democratic election they've ever had. And today as we stand here, President Karzai is being formally inaugurated in Kabul.

This is especially important today as we view the events in the Ukraine and Kiev. Today I join my colleagues in voicing support for Ukraine's independence, its territorial integrity and its sovereignty. We all back the democratic process that is underway and we are looking for an outcome that reflects the true will of the Ukrainian people.

The OSCE is working to fight other challenges facing us, from terrorism to trafficking in persons. Today my colleagues and I in our meetings will support the appointment of OSCE special representatives to combat anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination against Muslims. These representatives will build on the good work done to raise the profile of the fight against intolerance at OSCE events during the past year.

The work of OSCE will not be finished until we achieve the vision of a true trans-Atlantic community of 55 nations. This is an ambitious goal, but one that Europe and America can achieve by working together. And so, Solomon, I thank you, I thank your government, and I thank the people of Bulgaria for hosting us, and I especially thank you for your friendship and support over the past four years. Thank you, my friend.

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: Thank you, thank you, Colin. You have the floor for questions.

QUESTION: Can I ask Mr. Powell, are you confident that the elections in Iraq for January are on track? And will you forget about politics after next January?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are moving forward to have those elections on the 30th of January. President Ghazi, Sheikh Ghazi, is in Washington today and he has reaffirmed that. Prime Minister Allawi has reaffirmed it. The UN is hard at work, but more importantly, the Iraqi election officials are hard at work and voter lists are being prepared. The challenge, of course, is security, and our military forces—the Coalition

military forces—are increasing their capability over the next two months, in order to make sure that a secure environment is created for those elections. It's important that the elections go forward as scheduled on the 30th of [January], and it I think with Coalition forces—especially the very brave and dedicated Bulgarian Forces who are there—there is no reason that this should not take place. I might take this occasion once again to thank Bulgaria for its troop presence in Iraq and to again extend my sympathy and condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the cause of freedom for the Iraqi people.

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: Secretary Powell certainly will not...may or may not leave domestic politics, I don't know. But he certainly will not leave international politics because I have just invited him to campaign for me for our next elections.

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't have any post-January plans yet. George?

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, President Putin said yesterday that the United States is playing "sphere of interest politics" in the former Soviet Union in the name of democracy. Do you have any response to that?

SECRETARY POWELL: The people of the Ukraine are playing democracy in the name of freedom. What I have been seeing on my television screen for the last several weeks are people going out into the streets in Kiev and other cities in the Ukraine saying, "we want to have a free, fair, open election." The Ukrainians have worked out a way to do that with the help of the international community. I congratulate the EU and President Kwasniewski, and President Adamkus, and others who have helped in this matter. And I hope today all of the pieces will come together and the Ukrainian Rada will ratify a plan to move forward. So, what we have seen is not anyone interfering in democracy—quite the contrary. What we have seen in recent weeks is the international community coming together to support democracy. Democracy means free, fair, open elections that are untainted, and that's what the Ukrainians deserve and that's what they are going to get, we hope, by the end of the month.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, are you going to meet the Russian foreign minister here in Sofia?

SECRETARY POWELL: I expect to. Foreign Minister Lavrov and I meet whenever we are in the same city or the same conference. And so, I look forward to seeing him in the course of the morning.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, is there anything you can say to reassure the Russians that you are not simply trying to extend US influence into what they have long regarded as part of their sphere of influence?

SECRETARY POWELL: "Spheres of influence," I think, is a term that really isn't relevant to the circumstances that we are facing today. If you look at the situation in Georgia, the United States is not interested in a "sphere of influence." We are interested in the Georgian people being free to choose their own leaders and to practice democracy,

to reach out to both the East and the West, and to find friends in the East and the West. We are not competing or fighting over these places. We are not asking them to choose between the East and the West. I think that this is the same in Ukraine, it is the same in the Central Asian Republics, and in the Caucasus. It is a different world we are living in, where people want freedom, they want democracy, they want to be able to select their own leaders, they want to be able to select their own partners and friends. And I think most of them have realized, as Bulgaria has realized as it came out of its past, that its interests are best served by joining the trans-Atlantic community, in this case NATO, the European Union, participating fully in the Security Council, taking on the leadership role of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, and being friends both to the West and to the East. There is no need for these two concepts to be in conflict. You can have friends to the East and to the West and it is not a matter of a "sphere of influence." It is a matter of allowing a country to choose how it wishes to be governed and who it wishes to have as its friends.

QUESTION: A question for Secretary Powell. What would the US consider to be a constructive role for Slovenia in next year's Chairmanship of the OSCE?

SECRETARY POWELL: I am quite sure that Slovenia will do a good job under the leadership of Foreign Minister Rupel, and we look forward to working with them. I hope that Slovenia will be able to expand the work of OSCE observer missions. I would like to see observer missions work in the Middle East as we move forward with the Road Map. I would like to see election observer missions work in Iraq, if that is possible. I think the fieldwork of OSCE is very, very important. I hope that it will be supported, and I hope the new Chairman-in-Office will be able to work out any other budget difficulties that still seem to be a problem with OSCE activities. And, I would hope that there also will be an expansion of the partners of OSCE, so that OSCE will have a greater reach. And I am quite confident Slovenia will be able to work in all of these issues.

QUESTION: Good morning, gentlemen. Two questions for both of you. First, regarding Moldova.

SECRETARY POWELL: Two questions to both of us?

QUESTION: Yeah. Regarding Moldova, do you find any chance for working on a declaration on Moldova to settle the crisis with Russia? And, second, on the case of the Bulgarian medics in Libya, how would you comment on the last statements of the Foreign Minister of Tripoli regarding the case? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: On Moldova, we shall be trying to reach agreement on each of the outstanding issues of OSCE until the very end of the meeting, so I cannot predict what the outcome will be. And on Libya, I'll ask Secretary Powell.

SECRETARY POWELL: On Libya, we have been pressing the Libyans on every occasion to resolve this question and release the Bulgarian nurses. We think the facts in this case are clear. We hope that justice will be served and compassion will be shown.

We have seen some statements from the Libyans in recent days. I don't know if that amounts to a change in position or progress, but in all of our conversations with the Libyans we will continue to press the case for the release of the Bulgarian nurses.

FOREIGN MINISTER PASSY: Thank you very much. Now we invite all of you to cover the speech of Secretary Powell downstairs.